

Selecting an Examiner

If you are selecting an examiner, it is useful to have a set of criteria to ensure a good fit and a positive experience for everyone. Besides looking for someone who is rigorous, has the right expertise and a deep understanding of the practice the student is operating on, there are several relevant factors to consider in aiding your selection. Check your institution's regulations, and the proposed criteria below with examples of case studies to help you make a decision on selecting an external examiner for an Artistic Research PhD.

- **Awareness of current trends in the field.**

“What is the current thinking? You always feel that it’s like you’re entering this stream. (...) but I now realise I was part of this train of thought, a legacy of thinking. I think it’s very important that the examiner is aware of that and usually they are. And also interconnected - related to the students’ work themselves. Ideally they would be someone that is quoted and referenced within the PhD itself.” (staff member, 2020)

- **Ability to recognise the value of creative practice.**

“If you are not familiar you can be very insecure as an examiner coming in. If you’re someone coming from a very theoretical perspective and you do not recognise the weight of the creative work as part of the thesis you could underestimate that as an offering and only take the written document as the thing. You really need somebody who will recognise and be able to read the practice and the complexities of the work, not just understand the theoretical side of things. Otherwise, it’s very easy to dismiss the work - its subtleties and nuances. I’ve had really wonderful experiences of examining where I’d note, because I’ve been through certain elements and areas of enquiry as a practitioner, I could really see how someone was moving something on quite profoundly by the ability to language a particular type of process. But I could also see somebody outside that field who has never grappled with that not looking in the same area. So, I think it’s very important that at least one of the examiners has an understanding of the practice element of the research.” (staff member, 2020)

- **Deep understanding of how practice articulates new knowledge.**

“I think it’s very easy to miss the subtleties of innovation as they occur in the work. One experience I had was somebody writing about authentic movement as a practice. And I had done a lot of that work in a different context. And they had found a really great way of articulating that, and some of the theory they connected to, I thought was very profound. I got very excited about how they made this bridge. But I could understand how if you hadn’t really grappled with that practically, you might not recognise, that that was quite an important leap. I think that we sometimes think that we are doing the arts practice and then hanging some theory on it in a way that validates it: ‘So, I’ve done this now so who will help me validate what I do?’ But you should be much more looking at how we see these leaps, steps happening through, in the practice itself. And how maybe then we are able to frame that in a way that’s very interconnected. From an examination point of view, you can be very unlucky. You might get someone who just doesn’t get that. It’s not rigorous writing, it’s not enough. Enough hasn’t been done. But there might be something in the work that’s quite profound.” (staff member, 2020)

- **Relevant specialism.**

“You have to make sure the examiner has the right expertise to adjudicate on the project, and that can be difficult because the project can take such creative and inventive forms, you need to be really sure that the person assessing it has the right specialism to properly gauge whether or not it is an appropriate level, and if their experience is even slightly off, it is possible that they could mis-judge it, so that is something that has to be really carefully thought out as well, and most supervisors and PhD candidates will have that discussion about who they approach to do the Viva, but maybe the first, second or third choice is not available and perhaps they choose someone who isn’t quite right for assessing the project, and misunderstands it and asks for unreasonable revisions and so on. That is a danger as well.” (staff member, 2020)

- **Understanding of the language and of the value of Artistic Research.**

“How do we find examiners with the language with which to examine Artistic Research? How can we frame this language so that our institutions understand the value of these contributions while still ensuring that particular creative space that this particular sector has to offer?” (Triona Ní Shíocháin, Envisioning the Future of Artistic Doctorates in Ireland, 2020)